

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 RSC-01

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FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1414

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L B A G H D A D 8 1 6

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IZ

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT AL-BAKR'S HEALTH AND SUCCESSION QUESTION

REF: BAGHDAD 764

1. PRESIDENT AL-BAKR HAS NOT MADE PUBLIC APPEARANCE SINCE
BEFORE DEATH OF HIS WIFE ON NOVEMBER 17. RUMORS ARE RIFE
ABOUT STATE OF HIS HEALTH,
WITH DIAGNOSES RANGING FROM A MILD
FORM OF DIABETES (YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR) TO SERIOUS HEART ATTACK
(PAKISTANI AMBASSADOR). BRITISH ARE ATTEMPTING TO CONFIRM THEIR
REPORT OF CANCER OF STOMACH (REFTEL). ONLY CERTAINTY IS THAT
PRESIDENT IS ILL, SINCE EVEN DG OF PROTOCOL HAS ADMITTED THIS.

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NEW AMBASSADORS FROM FRG, INDIA AND BANGLADESH WAITING TO
PRESENT CREDENTIALS.

2. IF PRESIDENT AL-BAKR SHOULD DIE OR LEAVE OFFICE IT SEEMS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN WOULD REPLACE HIM AS PRESIDENT. IN ADDITION TO BEING DE FACTO PRIME MINISTER, SADDAM HAS DURING PAST YEAR INCREASINGLY EXERCISED PUBLIC ROLE OF HEAD OF STATE (E.G. RABAT SUMMIT, STATE VISITS TO INDIA, YUGOSLAVIA, AND ALGERIA, AND RECEPTION OF FOREIGN GUESTS IN BAGHDAD). IN ADDITION, CABINET RESHUFFLE OF NOVEMBER 11 (BAGHDAD 792) CONSOLIDATED HIS PERSONAL CONTROL AND SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT SERIOUS OPPOSITION. YUGOSLAV AMB TOLD ME THAT PRESIDENT AL-BAKR HAD APPROVED ALL CABINET CHANGES AND THAT THERE ARE NO SERIOUS DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SADDAM AND THE PRESIDENT. IN SHORT, SADDAM IS ALREADY DE FACTO PRESIDENT AND THERE APPEARS TO BE NO OBSTACLE TO HIS BECOMING DE JURE PRESIDENT IF AND WHEN IT BECOMES NECESSARY.

3. ACCORDING TO INTERIM CONSTITUTION, SADDAM AS VICE CHAIRMAN OF RCC AUTOMATICALLY REPLACES PRESIDENT IN CASE HE UNABLE TO EXERCISE HIS FUNCTIONS "FOR ANY LEGAL REASON." (ART 38B). NEW PRESIDENT MUST BE ELECTED BY RCC FROM AMONG ITS MEMBERS BY MAJORITY OF TWO-THIRDS. (ART 38A). THESE LEGAL NICETIES UNLIKELY TO INFLUENCE SUCCESSION. LOWRIE

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